United Nations E/2003/NGO/1

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
16 June 2003

Original: English

Substantive session of 2003
Geneva, 30 June-25 July 2003
Item 2 of the provisional agenda*
Promoting an integrated approach to rural development in developing countries for poverty eradication and sustainable development

Statement submitted by Franciscans International, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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In order to promote "an integrated approach to rural development in developing countries for poverty eradication and sustainable development", Franciscans International makes the following recommendations based on the NGO strategy session held in preparation for the high-level segment and on "Best practices in poverty eradication: case studies from the field", a report issued by the NGO Subcommittee for the Eradication of Poverty of the NGO Committee for Social Development, which Franciscans International chairs.

People in rural areas must be empowered and given adequate resources to take charge of their own development. Human capacity-building is essential, and must include skills in community organizing and leadership. Governments should use community structures already in place, and partner with rural non-governmental organizations in their development policy. While national budgets should at least reflect the urban/rural population ratio, Governments, in respect of development, should approach urban and rural areas as complementarities and not as competitors, fostering linkages among communities. Initially, Governments may have to direct more funding to rural areas that have little infrastructure or access to services and markets.

Rural development must take into account the special circumstances of specific groups including indigenous peoples, women, youth and older persons. Due

* E/2003/100.

03-39962 (E) 200603

attention must be paid to the practice of collective land ownership in indigenous communities. The rights of indigenous populations to land must be guaranteed, and their traditional knowledge, particularly in healing, should be validated and supported, while indigenous youth must have access to education and job training. Development programmes fostered from outside the community will not be as successful as those designed and implemented with the full participation and inclusion of local leaders and community members, including women and elders. It is of utmost importance to respect and include the participation of indigenous community members, especially in decision-making processes.

Women and girls achieve most of the food production in many areas, and must play a key role in any rural development plans. They must have the right to own and inherit land, and to have a say in the distribution of their production. The education of girls pays a particularly high rate of return, improving the health and well-being of their future families, and enabling them to take a leadership role in their communities. The education of girls is an especially effective tool for national development, since developing countries cannot afford to ignore the skills and talents of half of their citizenry. Education enables women to increase their economic productivity, improve their self-confidence, provide a more wholesome environment for their families, participate in decision-making, and become community leaders.

Capitalizing on the collective strengths of rural women is an effective strategy for Governments. This means providing rural women with the needed infrastructures for water, energy, basic health care, easy access to microcredits, adult literacy programmes, training for capacity-building and transfer of useful technology. Rural women should be involved in the planning, implementation and monitoring of every project and programme that Governments undertake on their behalf and on behalf of their communities.

HIV/AIDS is a threat to rural development. Recognizing that, as education increases, HIV/AIDS infections decrease, Secretary-General Kofi Annan has even written of the "education vaccine" for AIDS. Poor girls in rural areas, who are the least likely to receive primary education, will be the most vulnerable to AIDS. This will have a major impact on future food security, as girls and women become unable to farm because of their own illness, or because of caring for other family members or orphans.

Job training and employment opportunities are especially important to make sure that the assets of the young are not lost to the cities. Income-generating projects that provide a sustainable livelihood are essential. Relevant education is key to technical, social and sustainable development in rural areas: for self-respect; for job training; for community empowerment; for family improvement; for capacity-building; for specific knowledge; for technological literacy etc. Distance learning, information and communication technologies and other creative educational methods will make higher education more available and should focus on the environment and on building a sustainable future. Capacity-building among people living in poverty and among young people will go a long way towards creating a sustainable future.

The resources and contributions of elderly people to both family and community must be recognized and valued. Recent international trends affecting families have put increasing responsibilities on the older population in rural areas.

Many senior citizens are responsible for their grandchildren at a time when they are little able to provide for their own economic needs. In some villages, people in their prime productive years have been devastated by AIDS, leaving the elderly and young to step in and fill the gap. Essential support must be available to elder people in rural areas, as they continue to play a vital role in community life. Their wisdom and experience make their participation in all stages of poverty reduction and development plans essential.

We recommend significant, concrete government programmes to redistribute ownership of fertile land, so that those living in rural poverty can contribute to food security and poverty eradication. Research into water harvesting, drought-resistant seeds, dry farming techniques and other aspects of sustainable agriculture must be encouraged, and the results shared in systematic education outreach.

Building a well-developed, integrated infrastructure is essential: information infrastructure will give farmers access to regional prices, weather forecasts and new techniques necessary to address climate change and desertification; improved roads will increase access to markets and health care, provide construction jobs and allow tourism; and basic social services such as water and electricity will increase productivity and overall quality of life.

Governments must understand that true development projects are always for the long run; they must assume responsibility for long-term financing, continuity and involvement. True development projects also address the core of the problem, not just the symptoms. Rural development can thrive only in a climate of social stability, free of corruption, war and political intimidation.

We encourage Governments to partner with local community organizations that know the people, rather than large organizations that might be more convenient to work with but are not part of the rural community. People who live in conditions of poverty must be part of programme design and development.

Sometimes relationships between Governments and non-governmental organizations are not easy to negotiate, but such partnerships are essential for the highest level of successful rural development. Any mistrust, aloofness or corruption must give way to cooperative partnerships in which Governments and non-governmental organizations facilitate and support each other as they work to eradicate poverty and create sustainable development in rural areas. Good governance is a prerequisite.

Governments should recognize the differing but complimentary roles of non-governmental organizations and Governments in rural development and create development processes that are transparent and accessible, especially to small rural non-governmental organizations. Governments are encouraged to share relevant information regarding rural development goals, projects, assets and problems with non-governmental organizations, and to involve local non-governmental organizations in planning programmes. Governments should tap the expertise of non-governmental organizations and include them in monitoring, evaluating and analysing rural development projects.

In addition to the national and community development strategies suggested above, international financial institutions (IFIs) play a key role in rural development. IFIs cannot pressure developing nations to cut essential development projects or social services in order to service unsustainable debts. Trade subsidies

that protect Northern agribusiness at the expense of farmers in developing nations must be eliminated.

The non-governmental organization community urges the Economic and Social Council to pay greater attention to the fact that while macropolicies, especially of the IFIs, have helped to improve the overall economies of some of the developing countries, they have not helped those who live in the poorest conditions in those countries to get out of poverty. An **integrated approach** to rural development, at both the State/national and international levels, must have macro- and microdevelopment policies that work in unison.